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# THE DUTCH AFSCHEIDING OF 1834: AN ANALYSIS OF A COUNTER-MOVEMENT OF THE CALVINIST KLEINE LUYDEN

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If the world should perish, I will go to the Netherlands; there everything happens fifty years later.

Heinrich Heine

ABSTRACT

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The labouring poor of the Netherlands in the early nineteenth century have been studied, particularly those who still adhered to orthodox Calvinism. It was found that their support of two orthodox ministers who seceded from the State Church in 1834 was not just an expression of their religious convictions. Traditionalism, and reaction against deplorable social conditions as well as against the hostile posture adopted by the authorities, were not inconsiderable contributing elements.

In the days of the Dutch Republic ordinary folk had begun to react against the formalism and the liberalism which had permeated the official Church. Small groups of pious folk formed conventicles and gradually drifted away from a close association with the Reformed denomination of which they remained full members. When in the early nineteenth century the State assumed control of the Church and tried to limit and discourage the unauthorized religious practices, the orthodox kleine luyden felt threatened. Their deteriorating social conditions heightened the value they placed on their informal meetings which had become a tradition, an integral part of their life-style. When two isolated congregations followed their ministers out of the Church, small groups of kleine luyden throughout the country joined the secessionists.

Acknowledgements

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CONTENTS

During the first half of the nineteenth century two movements occurred in the Netherlands which have been characterized as counter-movements (kontrabewegingen).[1] The first, known in Dutch history as Het Réveil (the Awakening), had its origin in 1823, with the publication of Isaak da Costa's polemic Bezwaren tegen de Geest der Eeuw (Objections to the Spirit of the Age). Da Costa's little book has been called "...an accusation against his day, against the consequences of the French Revolution, against the overweening conceit of the people."[2] It brought about a veritable avalanche of angry reaction, especially from liberal circles within the State Church, a reaction which caused da Costa's learned tutor, the controversial poet Willem Bilderdyk, to spring to the defense of his much loved pupil. Bilderdyk, da Costa, and indeed all of the proponents of the Awakening were bitterly resented and opposed by the Reformed (Hervormd) hierarchy.[3] Yet few of the Réveil men joined the dissident group of the 1830's in its formal and permanent separation, known as the Afscheiding, from the established Church. This reluctance to break away is to be explained in part at least in terms of the traditional loyalty of the upper classes to what they considered to be their Church. Het Réveil, then, was a counter-movement spawned from within the privileged classes known in Holland as de gegoede stand.*

* See glossary

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1. D. Th. Kuiper, De Voormannen (Kampen: J.H. Kok B.V., 1972), p. 57.

2. M. Elizabeth Kluit, Het Protestantse Réveil in Nederland en daarbuiten, 1815-1865 (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris N.V., 1970), p. 145.

3. L.H. Wagenaar, Het "Réveil" en de "Afscheiding" (Heerenveen: J. Hephema, 1880), p. 53.

The second movement, called de Afscheiding (the Separation), was triggered in 1834, when a Reformed congregation issued a declaration of "restoration or secession" after its minister had been suspended from his pastoral duties by the governing General Synod of the Church. That a separation from the State Church came about was not remarkable. The polarization caused by the Awakening had become such that, given the inflexible position of the General Synod and the government, a break had to come sooner or later. What is remarkable, however, is that the separation finally occurred not in the congregations within which the main figures of the Awakening were active, in the sophisticated and more affluent city churches, but rather in congregations in the border provinces, in the outlying districts of Groningen, Friesland, Drente, Overysel, Gelderland, Brabant, and Zeeland.[4] Whereas the Réveil was primarily a movement of the Reformed elite, the Afscheiding was supported almost exclusively by common folk, the kleine luyden* of the small towns and villages in the countryside. It elicited an uncommonly harsh response from the governing officials, both of Church and State, in spite of the vaunted toleration proclaimed by the new liberalism. Yet despite harrassment and persecution the movement persisted, resulting ultimately in government recognition of a new Protestant denomination in the Netherlands, known initially as the Christelyk Gereformeerde Kerken (Christian Reformed Churches).

* See glossary

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4. H. Algra, Het Wonder van de 19e Eeuw (Franeker: T. Wever, 1966), p. 200, map.

Latourette is of the opinion that the Afscheiding came "out of the extreme wing of the awakening in the Reformed Church and as a reaction against liberalism..."[5] This assertion may be accurate insofar as it comments on the theological basis of the secessionist movement. It fails, however, to take into account the various sociological factors underlying this event. What rôle, for instance, did traditionalism play in bringing mainly common people to support so radical a step as secession? To what extent did the deplorable social conditions of the kleine luyden compel them to support the handful of country ministers in their herculean struggle against both Church and State? And who, finally, were these people, these kleine luyden, whose tenacity ultimately led the government to accept the secession as an irrevocable fact? This thesis is an attempt to find some tentative answers to these questions.

As for sources, it has been no easy matter to locate sufficient material on Dutch social history in North America. Fortunately, the Calvin Theological Library in Grand Rapids, Michigan, contains a considerable number of original documents on both the Réveil and the Afscheiding. Especially the four-volume Archiefstukken Betreffende de Afscheiding van 1834, edited by F.L. Bos and consisting of letters, official reports and court records, proved to contain invaluable sources. Few of the other works, however, contained any direct information about

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5. Kenneth Scott Latourette, The Nineteenth Century in Europe: The Protestant and Eastern Churches (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 240.

the kleine luyden, or about the sociological factors underlying the Afscheiding. Indeed, almost all the primary sources dealt with the theological aspect of the dispute while most secondary studies concentrated on the actions and attitudes of the principal figures involved. Some popular histories of the conflict, especially those of Rullmann, and Algra, had to be largely ignored due to the regrettable absence of references to sources. Much useful information, however, was obtained from the works of I.J. Brugmans, still perhaps the foremost authority on the Dutch labouring classes. Information about historical developments prior to 1815 was gleaned from a variety of general and church histories. All translations from Dutch sources are my own.

A rather obvious gap in the historiography of the Netherlands is the absence of a definitive study of het volk* in the nineteenth century. This thesis constitutes a very tentative step towards the filling of that void.

* See glossary

I.

The preparation of the kleine luyden for the Afscheiding of the 1830's is rooted in Dutch history. In fact, as early as the sixteenth century the traditions which were to influence the lives of countless generations of labouring poor were already being established. Dutch society was then largely a pastoral one in which the tempo of life was slow and the overall disposition of the people was calm. With the exception of the emerging trading centers along the coastline of Holland, the Low Countries were a natural spawning ground for such a quietly devout religious order as the Brethren of the Common Life, whose members calmly and quietly performed their various activities in towns and villages along the Ysel River in the eastern part of the country. The humanism of Erasmus had found fertile ground throughout the Netherlands, but especially in the provinces of Holland where life was quickening as the profits of a flourishing maritime trade were beginning to flow in. The religious attitudes of the day have been characterized as mystical, humanistic, and practical.[1] While Calvinism spread rapidly throughout the region it was from the beginning more readily adopted by the quiet, pious, common folk of the country than by the hardnosed, pragmatic merchant-captains of the Holland towns. Calvinism, writes Elton of the Low Countries in the sixteenth century, "was strongest among the proletariat of the Walloon towns in the south and among the

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1. H. Berkhof, Geschiedenis Der Kerk (Nykerk: G.F. Callenbach N.V., 1947), p. 211.

backward peasantry of the northeast."[2] The war with Spain (1568-1648) forced many of the southern Calvinists northward, where most of them settled in the rural communities of Zeeland, Brabant and Gelderland. It is more than merely coincidental that the Afscheiding of the kleine luyden, some 250 years later, occurred precisely in these areas: the northeast, center, and southwest.

The advent of Calvinism, coinciding with and contributing to the rising tide of revolt against Spain, was not looked upon by all as an undivided blessing. The Erasmian liberals resented and resisted the strict dogmas and theocratic pretensions of the numerically insignificant Calvinists.[3] Their opposition was formidable indeed, for they were the merchant oligarchy of the Holland cities; they held the purse-strings, they were the civil magistrates known to the Dutch as regenten (regents).

During the Twelve-Years Truce (1609-1621) this classic conflict between Church and State came to a head when, in a striking precedent for the Afscheiding of 1834, the civil authorities interfered in Church affairs by forcing the appointment of several liberal (Arminian) ministers to Reformed congregations. The response was dramatic: Riots occurred. Several congregations declared themselves dolerend* and seceded from the official Church. This the authorities would not tolerate. They hired armed guards (waardgelders) to preserve the peace and

* Dolerend, from the Latin doleo, means grieving or mourning.

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2. G.R. Elton, Reformation Europe, 1517-1559. The Fontana History of Europe, gen. ed. J.H. Plumb (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1963), p. 234.

3. Johan Goudsblom, Dutch Society (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 17.

to force dissidents back into line. In doing so, however, they gave their political opponent, Stadholder Prince Maurice of Orange, sufficient reason for asserting his authority over them. As Captain-General of the armed forces he fired the armed guards, arrested the Grand Pensionary of Holland and publicly sided with the orthodox clergy. His actions earned him the support and devotion of the orthodox Calvinists. They also gave rise to two opposing views of Dutch history.

Between the year 1618, when Maurice defeated his opponents, and our own century the Dutch have consistently been exposed either to an Orangist or a Statist* myth, depending on their social background. The kleine luyden of the Afscheiding were undoubtedly thoroughly imbued with the Orangist myth. It certainly influenced their attitude towards the ruling elite of their day. Professor Geyl, the distinguished Dutch historian, explained the two legends as follows:

> Each party cultivated a view of the past in which the great men of the rival party cut sorry figures: the Stadholders were maltreated in the history of the Statists; and so were the great Grand Pensionaries, the States of Holland, Amsterdam, in the history of the Orangists. Each side used these self-constructed bogies in order to cast ignominy on its contemporaries of the other persuasion. In these impassioned controversies cool historical criticism did occasionally make itself heard, but this--not exclusively, yet mainly and more effectively--on the side of the Statists.[4]

* The Dutch term Staten, meaning States, referred to the form of government then current in the territory. Since early times the Dutch coastal towns had been granted extensive rights and privileges in their charters, making them virtually autonomous. Representatives of these independent city states made up the provincial governments, hence the name staten as in de Staten van Holland (the Holland States). Statists were almost exclusively members of the upper classes who feared a powerful stadholder as he might reduce their rights or even unify the country. Besides, stadholders were very expensive commodities.

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4. Peter Geyl, "Historical Appreciations of the Holland Regent Régime", Chapter VII, pp. 148-172 in his History of the Low Countries: Episodes and Problems (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1964), pp. 149-50.

The Orangist legend, based largely on religious, that is Calvinist, sentiment, became the perspective from which most Dutchmen and especially the Calvinists viewed their own society and history. It found its strongest expression in the early nineteenth century in the virulent writings of Willem Bilderdyk, whose twelve volume Geschiedenis des Vaderlands (History of the Fatherland) Geyl characterizes as one protracted Orangist pamphlet.[5]

Of the individuals or groups of individuals who influenced the attitudes of the common folk, the Calvinist clergy unquestionably were the most significant. Although there was at all times a sizable minority of Roman Catholics in the tolerant Republic, their clergymen were never organized or militant. It certainly behooved them never to rock any boats in a country where their faith was not even officially allowed to exist. The Calvinist clergy, on the other hand, had worked hard to mould the Dutch into a Protestant nation. They had met with some signal failures. They failed, for instance, to gain political control, and the regents managed to keep them out of the town councils and the provincial States. Yet they had been successful in establishing membership in the Reformed State Church as a prerequisite for appointment to any public office. Furthermore, they had also gained control of the schools, such as they were, and their weekly catechism lessons for the young enabled them to keep their church members relatively safe from heretical ideas.

The Orangist attitude of the orthodox ministers proved as con-

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5. Ibid., p. 150.

tageous as it was simplistic. The complicated facts of Dutch history they reduced to a formula of child-like simplicity. God, Orange, and het volk* constituted a divinely ordained (theocratic) unity against which only arrogant and godless regents dared to militate. It was an antithesis their simple charges could understand, and they did. The devout, orthodox "little folk" were often more Orange than the princes themselves; their perception of the concept Orange often surpassed that of the increasingly mediocre men who bore the title. Nor was the antipathy the ministers harboured toward the oligarchs lost on the kleine luyden. Although they were imbued with a reverence bordering on awe for the aanzienlyken (upper classes), they were appalled by the frivolous libertinism of the rich. It is also important to note that the Reformed clergy came almost exclusively from the ranks of the kleine luyden,[6] and found it difficult to understand the pragmatic business mentality of the astute merchants and bankers. Max Weber's argument for a functional relationship between capitalism and the Protestant ethic they would have greeted with snorts of indignation. Rather, they would have explained the driving ambition of the Dutch patriciate in terms of pagan worship and the service of Mammon.

Another formative element in the conditioning of the kleine luyden was the absence of effective communication. The road-system was poor, and even in the first half of the nineteenth century the

*See glossary

6. C. R. Boxer, The Dutch Seaborn Empire, 1600-1800 in "The History of Human Society" series, J. H. Plumb, gen. ed. (London: Hutchison, 1965), pp. 118, 121.

most efficient means of transportation in the Netherlands was the horse-drawn barge (trekschuit). The congregations outside the populated centers tended therefore to be isolated. Their world was limited to what lay within the village or county boundaries. Weeks and even months might pass without any word from the outside world penetrating the empty silences in which these small communities were shrouded. It seems inevitable that a form of individualism would develop, an individualism of groups rather than of individuals.[7] Each town, each village, each tiny hamlet thus developed a personality of its own. In the same manner the congregations in the outlying provinces developed an element of collective character, of group individualism. Within these groups the ministers were cardinal figures. The congregations afforded them deference, often extreme deference. The minister was seen as uniquely the servant of God and in this office he conducted the church services; he visited the sick and widows; he comforted those who mourned and extended aid to the destitute. Finally, having mastered the mysteries of reading and writing, he was looked up to as a learned man. It is only natural, therefore, that most ministers commanded respect and that their voices carried much weight in the deliberations of the consistories--the councils of elders and (sometimes) deacons which governed each congregation.* Their theo-

* From its earliest days the Dutch Reformed Church had adopted the presbyterian form of church organization, whereby local congregations were recognized as being practically autonomous entities; the higher assemblies concerned themselves primarily with matters of doctrine and with subjects of common interest. Given this degree of local autonomy the rôle of the consistory takes on added significance while that of the minister clearly becomes central.

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7. Christopher Bagley, The Dutch Plural Society: a comparative study in race relations (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 2.

logical leanings as well as their political preferences and social prejudices at this time usually went far to determine the nature and character of a congregation. The Reformed Church was very much a ministers' church. This had profound consequences.

The doctrinal basis of the Church had been formalized by the Synod of Dort (1618-19). Called the Three Forms of Unity, it consisted of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. These three credal forms became the guidelines upon which generations of ministers based their teachings and from which countless believers received their instruction. Yet they did not ensure unity, for the struggle against heresy and doctrinal impurities had been too long, the sacrifices made had left too enduring memories for the clergy to relax. They proceeded the stress the creeds to the point where they became more important than Scripture. Purity of doctrine became an end in itself.[8] The sterile and unimaginative church services that issued from this learned legalism caused many to turn away from the Church. It also paved the way for yet more theological disputes among clergy on the one hand and for a boom in conventicle-forming on the other. It is this latter phenomenon that bears directly on the Afscheiding and must be examined more fully.*

* The term conventicle refers to an assembly held for the purpose of worship without formal sanction from the established Church. The English dissenters met in such assemblies in the movement known as pietism in the seventeenth century. In fact, it was the practical devotion of the English Calvinists, their emphasis on the Christian life rather than on doctrine, that formed the heart of the reaction to the legalism then current in the Dutch Church. The rise of conventicles is therefore closely connected with the spread of pietism in the Low Countries. Yet although much of the initial impetus to conventicle-forming came from beyond the narrow confines of the United Provinces--from England, Switzerland, and Germany--two practices existed in the Netherlands which, especially in the eighteenth century, became confused and, in fact, merged, thereby establishing a tradition which was to become a principal cause for the Afscheiding of 1834.

8. Berkhof, Geschiedenis, p. 227.

As early as 1571 it was decided at a Synod held in Emden* that certain people with special qualities should be prepared for the ministry by allowing them to practice (oefenen) preaching before a small circle of officers from the Church.[9] These sessions became known as Oefeningen (literally: practices) which were formal occasions in which all of the official forms of the regular Sunday worship were observed.[10] This practice was confirmed by the other synods, including the celebrated Synod of Dort.[11] It would seem that the fledgeling Church needed ministers and was prepared to accept capable individuals who did not have the benefit of formal theological schooling. Moreover, Article 61 of the Church Order specified that doctrinal instruction was to be provided in private homes to small groups of newly converted adults.[12] What is of particular interest here is the specific instruction that a question-and-answer method should be used and that some established members of the Church should be invited to attend as well, people "whose similar condition may encourage candid and open expression."[13] G. Keizer most likely refers to this type of meeting when, without citing any sources, he speaks of an "old custom":

* Before 1618, several synods were held in various German cities where large numbers of Dutch Calvinists had settled to escape the persecution of the Spanish inquisition.

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9. F. L. Bos, De Orde Der Kerk ('s Gravenhage: Uitgevery Guido de Brès, 1950), p. 84.

10. J. C. Rullmann, De Afscheiding in de Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk der XIXe Eeuw (Kampen: J. H. Kok N.V., 1930), p. 3.

11. Bos, Orde, pp. 11-12, 40, 84.

12. Ibid., p. 224.

13. Ibid., p. 225.

> They had at the time "catechizers" or "answerers". The preacher gave them certain questions in advance which they were expected to answer publicly, although the minister usually checked their replies first. In this manner the answerers got some practice (oefening)[14]. in public speaking as well as in the handling of religious subjects.[15]

This latter type meeting was, according to Rullmann--again, without reference to sources--rather informal, almost cozy (gezellig), and was referred to as gezelschap, which means company or society.[16] The oefeningen, therefore, were formal preaching-practice sessions while the gezelschappen were informal teaching assemblies using a question-and-answer method. As, after Dort, the reaction against intellectualism began to spread, especially among the less sophisticated kleine luyden, many gezelschappen turned into conventicles where lay preachers tried to explain doctrinal issues in simple terms but without formal sanction from the Church. Such lay readers became known as oefenaars, which is exactly the same term then already in use to describe those uniquely gifted but unschooled believers who were being groomed for the ministry. Into this fertile soil dropped the seeds of pietism, a movement which must have had great appeal for the common folk who could more readily appreciate the close and intimate relationships fostered through personal devotions in the sanctity of one's home or in a circle of close friends than the difficult and official preaching heard in church.

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14. Parenthetical insertion mine. The term oefening was to cause much confusion.

15. G. Keizer, De Afscheiding van 1834 (Kampen: J.H. Kok N.V., 1934), p. 53.

16. Rullmann, Afscheiding, loc. cit.

Gradually, then, conventicles grew in number. Not only that, but many of those attending these unauthorized assemblies stopped going to the official Church. As Algra puts it, they became small churches within the Church.[17] Thus the seeds of the Afscheiding were sown.

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17. Algra, Wonder, p. 96.

## II.

The economic condition of the kleine luyden had been consistently poor. When one thinks of Dutch history, scenes from its Golden Age are apt to come to mind. Those busy harbours and bustling towns, stately ladies and earnest looking gentlemen eternalized by Holland's great painters seem representative of early Dutch society. Historiography has long tended to generalize the affluence created by commercial successes, leaving the great bulk of the struggling masses unaccounted for. Yet all the glitter of the past does not alter the fact that between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries most Dutchmen were involved in agriculture and lived in the country. The kleine luyden rarely shared in the profits reaped from the burgeoning trade and the mounting capital investments across the seas. They often lived under the most deplorable conditions, never far removed from destitution and starvation.

Dutch agriculture was profoundly influenced by the virtual hegemony established by Netherlanders in the carrying trade. Already in the seventeenth century, "...virtually all the grain loaded at Baltic ports was shipped to the United Provinces, about four-fifths in Dutch vessels."[1] In spite of a heavy, and profitable, re-export most of that grain was used for local consumption, enabling or rather forcing many Dutch farmers to turn to agricultural specialization. Much land suitable for bread grains was consequently used for industrial crops to

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1. Jacob M. Price, "The Map of Commerce, 1683-1721," The Rise of Great Britain and Russia, 1688-1715/25, ed. J. S. Bromley, Vol. VI, Chap. XXIII of The New Cambridge Modern History (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), p. 837.

supply fledgeling industries and to satisfy the growing demands of the great cattle-raising farms. (Those affluent regents ate meat!) Furthermore, around the rapidly expanding towns and cities an ever-growing number of farmers turned to market gardening. In earlier days, however, Dutch farmers had successfully introduced new methods and techniques, enabling them to maintain the money economy which had spread from the cities into the countryside.[2] Between 1650 and 1750, consequently, the markets were consistently saturated, causing declining prices and wages. It must have been a period of excessive wretchedness, especially for the kleine luyden of the eastern provinces whose poverty had made them the buffoons of the Amsterdam stage,[3] It was toward the end of this period that a widespread rural industry came into being.[4] When around 1750 Europe's population started to rise while at roughly the same time the Dutch grain carrying trade went into eclipse, those who had been able to keep their farms profited handsomely from increased demands. For the vast number of cottars and farm labourers, however, the concomittant rise in prices was an unmitigated disaster as their money wages remained constant and thus their real wages declined. This unfortunate development had particular relevance for the Afscheiding as (we are told) "in the rural parts of the Netherlands money wages remained constant from

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2. Johan Huizenga, in his essay "The Spirit of the Netherlands," has described the thoroughly bourgeois character of the Dutch. Dutch Civilization in the Seventeenth Century (London: Collins, 1968), pp. 105-137.

3. Bernard H. M. Vlekke, Evolution of the Dutch Nation (New York: Roy Publishers, 1945), p. 207.

4. B. H. Slicher van Bath, The Agrarian History of Western Europe, A.D. 500-1850 (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), p. 218.

1697 to the middle of the nineteenth century.[5] In consequence, grinding poverty remained a constant factor, too.

Other developments further complicated the already perilous situation of the labouring classes. The Low Countries were chronically land poor. Increased demands simply could not be accompanied by a corresponding increase in production. The sudden growth in population inevitably led to a surplus of labour. In England such a surplus gave a significant stimulus to industrialization, but in the Netherlands this was not the case. The initially successful cloth and textile industries, which had once provided employment for many a failing farmer, was being rendered superfluous and unprofitable by British successes in these fields. In addition, Holland's old maritime ascendancy, already waning in the late eighteenth century, was dealt a crippling blow by the French occupation during the revolutionary period. Such industry as there was depended heavily on imported goods. When essential materials were no longer available and when the British occupied Dutch overseas possessions, the fate of industry in the Netherlands was doomed. Surplus labour had little else to do than emigrate* or throw itself on the mercy of the state.

Charity had long been institutionalized in the Netherlands. Civic magistrates as well as religious groups had established a tradition

* Countless Dutchmen emigrated to Brandenburg, Holstein, France (near LaRochelle) and even England, where they drained the Norfolk fens.

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5. Ibid., p. 225.

of support for the destitute that was little short of remarkable. In March, 1799, for instance, out of the 215,000 inhabitants of Amsterdam some 80,000 were on the dole which provided them not just with money, but often also with soup, bread and fuel. By 1809, a staggering 110,000 charity cases were being looked after.[6] Much later, after it had become painfully evident that the high hopes accompanying the Restoration had been false and groundless, the Dutch blithely continued to support the poor rather than create opportunities for them to help themselves. Orphanages, homes for the aged, public kitchens, alms, and gifts of all kinds were liberally provided. Even wages were subsidized when considered too low. It led I.J. Brugmans to remark that there was rather too much than too little interest in the poor.[7] When in 1854 the system culminated in the passage of a Poor Law a certain Vissering is said to have noted that Pauperism had become a booming business in Holland.[8]

As late as the 1850's the Dutch were still a largely pre-modern, pre-industrial society. To strive for increased profit margins was considered a foreign innovation by even leading businessmen. A good example of this persistent traditionalism was Willem de Clercq, a prosperous owner of a family grain firm and one time president of the Dutch Chamber of Commerce (Nederlandse Handelsmaatschappy). His objectives were social and philanthropic rather than purely economic. The purpose

6. I.J. Brugmans, Paardenkracht en Mensenmacht ('s Gravenhage: Martinus Nyhoff, 1961), p. 63.

7. I.J. Brugmans, De Arbeidende Klasse in Nederland in de 19e Eeuw ('s Gravenhage: Martinus Nyhoff, 1929), p. 194.

8. Loc. cit.

of new industry, he felt, was first of all to combat poverty. Consequently, he placed his orders first with "poor-factories" run by philanthropists. Secondly he would do business with small entrepreneurs, while large firms would get whatever orders the first two could not handle.[9] Willem de Clercq, one of the most gifted speakers of his day, was an important exponent of the Dutch Réveil. He was also a close friend of Isaak da Costa, the celebrated poet and fiery Christian Jew. De Clercq was not unusual among Dutch businessmen of the early nineteenth century; like him they were more preoccupied with poetry than profit; many of their closest friends were writers and scholars, not stockbrokers.

Not only was Willem de Clercq a talented extemporizer, he also was a man who faithfully kept a diary. On February 8, 1829, he recorded the amazement of a foreign visitor who was struck by the apathy, the barrenness, the half-heartedness of the Dutch.[10] Five years later, in August, 1834, he wrote; "In the northern Netherlands you can hear a leaf drop....Everything here is as dead as can be."[11] De Clercq, being affluent, was commenting primarily on the prevailing sloth of business. Nothing much was happening. At a lower level, however, something remarkable was happening. While charitable organizations were valiantly subsidizing the growing numbers of Dutch unemployed, new shipyards in Rotterdam (Feyenoord) and Amsterdam (Van Vlissingen) got underway with English workers, as did the first railroad companies. After 1830, new

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9. Brugmans, Paardenkracht, p. 79.

10. A. Pierson, Willem de Clercq (Haarlem: H. D. Tjenck Willinck, 1889), Book II, p. 76.

11. Ibid., p. 174.

textile firms, especially in Haarlem, began operating with German, Belgian and Swiss workers, while in 1846 a new sugar refinery in Rotterdam was established, staffed almost entirely with foreign personnel. Why? Because Dutch workers were lacking in industrial expertise.[12] Training the local unemployed does not seem to have crossed anybody's mind. In the countryside, vast numbers of German farm labourers were hired. Again why? Because it was claimed that Dutch day labourers were lacking in energy and strength.[13] During the first half of the nineteenth century, when unemployment reached disastrous proportions, foreign workers entered the country, of whom many settled permanently, finding employment in a great variety of occupations. Brugmans attributes this phenomenon to the laziness, physical inadequacy and technical ignorance of the Dutch worker.[14] Much of this deplorable state of affairs must be attributed to the extreme poverty of the kleine luyden and to the consistently high cereal prices. The Dutch labouring poor ate practically no bread and never ate meat. Potatoes and flour porridge were the usual fare. In fact, Brugmans is of the opinion that the food of the Dutch work force was barely on a par with that consumed in Ireland.[15] Clean, unpolluted water was scarce, beer a luxury no worker could afford. Gin, however, was cheap, and alcoholic abuse widespread. The rate of illiteracy was generally high among the kleine luyden, which

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12. Brugmans, Arbeidende Klasse, p. 82.
13. Ibid., p. 83.
14. Ibid., p. 84.
15. Ibid., p. 152.

is not surprising considering the low regard in which teachers were generally held. L.W. DeBree quotes a certain Rykens who wrote in 1824 that teachers did not have enough bread to eat, that "...the poor teacher usually depends on a sadly disrespectful bunch of oafs, who often toss him a couple of nickels by way of tuition, accompanied by all sorts of insults." And, "Working as gravedigger, caretaker, precentor, bell-ringer, church organist, as druggist or supplier of stationery they try to supplement their meagre income, both in city and countryside."[16] Finally, there was a high incidence of sexual immorality among the workers, yet, curiously, there are no records of complaints about their honesty and reliability.[17] This, then, was the situation in which the kleine luyden found themselves during the first half of the nineteenth century. This, too, is the background against which the Afscheiding of 1834 must be examined.

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16. L.W. DeBree, "Geloof in de Letterkast; schets van het lage onderwys omsteeks 1836," pp. 17-55 in Honderd Vyfentwintig Jaren Arbeid op het Onderwysterrein, 1836-1961 (Groningen: J.B. Wolters' Uitgevers-maatschappy N.V., 1961), p. 50.

17. Brummans, Arbeidende Klasse, p. 178.

III.

Although the political developments in the Netherlands between 1780 and 1820 affected the kleine luyden only indirectly, the Afscheiding of 1834 makes little sense without taking them into account. The Batavian Republic (1795-1806), born out of an indigenous revolution* through the midwivery of the French army, replaced the United Provinces, that most disunited and medieval anomally created by the regent oligarchs of the sixteenth century. After a couple of false starts the Batavian convention adopted a democratic constitution which, although modified several times, remained largely intact until 1814 when the Kingdom of the Netherlands was proclaimed. The new constitution of 1815 maintained the unitary nature of the state established by the Batavian convention but violated the democratic character of the earlier constitution by granting wide-ranging powers to the King. In consequence, enlightened absolutism prevailed in the new kingdom, dependent once more on the

* R.R. Palmer has suggested that one might well wonder "what 'revolution' could signify for so utterly middle-class a country, which had no genuine monarchy, no hierarchic church, few nobles, and few poor." The aversion of the Dutch toward violence and turmoil, the "prudence and readiness to depend on outsiders for armed support" made him feel that the Dutch revolution, like those of the other "sister Republics", was not a true revolution at all.[1] Elsewhere, however, he has quoted Pieter Geyl who asserted that it was indeed a true revolution.[2] Perhaps Palmer considered the non-violent course of events in Holland as not being revolutionary while accepting Geyl's evaluation of its consequences: a new government, a new order, a new law.

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1. R.R. Palmer, The World of the French Revolution (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 163-65.

2. R.R. Palmer, "Much in Little: The Dutch Revolution of 1795," The Journal of Modern History, Vol. XXVI, March 1954, p. 34.

same oligarchy which had held sway before the revolutionary upheavals.[3] While much had happened, little had changed. Economically, socially, and even politically the Netherlands continued to live in the eighteenth century.[4] Also carried forward from the previous century was the poverty of the kleine luyden, a poverty whose pinch had now been aggravated by the recent struggles with France and Britain.

The King, while still an exile in England, had come to admire the system in which the Anglican or State Church was directly related to and dependent upon the secular authorities. When, therefore, such a system was proposed for the new kingdom by a civil servant named Janssen, the King favoured it and signed it into law. On January 7, 1816, the Algemeen Reglement or General Regulation, a comprehensive decree affecting all aspects of the Reformed Church, came into force. It ordered all functionaries in the higher assemblies to withdraw from active participation in Church affairs by April 1. They were replaced by a series of boards all of whose members were appointed by the King. All of a sudden the Reformed Church, whose name had now officially become Nederlands Hervormde Kerk, was transformed into a unified and centralised arm of the State with an earthly king at its head. It had become a secularized organization with a hierarchical structure identical to that imposed on the newly reorganized nation. In one fell swoop and without prior consultation all local congregations throughout the country lost their prized autonomy. No longer were they allowed to call new ministers of

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3. C.H.E. DeWit, De Stryd Tussen Aristocratie en Democratie in Nederland, 1780-1848 (Heerlen: N.V. Uitgevery Winants, 1965), p. 342.

4. Ibid., p. 366.

their own choosing to their pulpits; nor could they elect their own local consistories.[5] Not only had the State entered the realm of the Church, it "...attempted to reorganize the Church according to the spirit of the age, a spirit which was decidedly secular, rooted in the adoration of reason and the deification of man."[6] Moreover the new Church, reflecting the freedom of doctrine favoured by Janssen and the King as well as the general desire for tolerance, did not include among its doctrinal principles either the Canons of Dort or the Church Order of 1618. As in the Anglican model, believers of a variety of shades--high or low, conservative or progressive, orthodox or modern--could now more easily be accomodated. Both in structure and doctrinal standards this new Church bore little resemblance to the old Gereformeerde Kerk of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As one writer put it, "1816 means the negation of 1618."[7]

Some disagreement exists among historians about the reaction of clergy and members generally to this virtual emasculation of their Church. According to one view the response was so negligible as to be hardly worth the mention. The reasons given are that the Spirit was gone and that most Church members were overcome by "the sleep of apathy."[8] "Some outstanding pastors (and lay preachers)"--it was

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5. Berkhof, Geschiedenis, pp. 287-88.

6. Louis Praamsma, Het Dwaze Gods (Wageningen: N.V. Gebr. Zomer & Keunings Uitgeversmaatschappy, 1950), p. 15.

7. Ibid., p. 17.

8. Groen van Prinsterer, Handboek der Geschiedenis van het Vaderland (Amsterdam: J.A. Wormser, 1895), pp. 779, 791.

said--"could still be found but they were a dying breed and rarely spoke up outside their churches."[9] "Only the classis (diocese) Amsterdam objected....Practically the entire denomination blithely accepted the new secular regency...."[10] There had been a spiritual collapse. "People had become estranged from the faith of the fathers."[11] The other view contends that there was a reaction. "Not only the classis Amsterdam protested, as has been assumed for many years, but the classes Tiel, Haarlem, Utrecht, Delft, and Delftland, Tielerwaard, Gorinchem and the Walloon Church of Dort objected to the injustice done the church."[12] The significance of the two positions lies in the fact that both sides missed the point. If indeed few people took issue with the imposition of secular authority in Church affairs, perhaps it was because those who still adhered to the orthodox beliefs had grown far removed from the official Church. The out-of-the-way congregations that still had Scripture-oriented ministers, as well as the conventicle groups with their orthodox lay preachers, had for so long been autonomous it is not unlikely they cared little about how the Church was structured. Perhaps they would never have thought of affecting a formal break had not the secular authorities gone out of their way to impose the new order on both conventicles and local congregations. As for the alternative view, that several regional assemblies did in fact protest, it is rather interesting to note

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9. G. J. Vos, Geschiedenis der Vaderlandsche Kerk (Dordrecht: J. P. Revers, 1888), p. 441.

10. Berkhof, Geschiedenis, p. 287.

11. G. Van Der Zee, Vaderlandsche Kerkgeschiedenis (Kampen: J. H. Kok N.V., no date), p. 197.

12. Praamsma, Het Dwaze Gods, p. 18. H. Algra echoed this sentiment in identical terms, Wonder, p. 65.

that almost all the assemblies mentioned--Amsterdam, Haarlem, Utrecht, Delft, Dort, Gorinchem--are located in the West central region of the country. This is the area of the sophisticated churches, of upper-class influence. So it appears that the second view complements the first and serves to suggest the underlying reasons for the different attitudes that appear to have prevailed in different regions of the country. It suggests that different courses of action were adopted not because of different perceptions and anxieties about liberalism and secular intervention, but rather because of the different composition of the social groups involved.

## IV.

As has been shown, the General Regulation of 1816 imposed State control over all formal aspects of the official Church. It also sought to regulate unofficial religious practices and in doing so precipitated the conflict that led to the Afscheiding of 1834. Little is known about the territorial distribution of conventicles and lay readings prior to 1816. G. Keizer maintains, however, that"...in the northern provinces as well as in Zeeland in the south remarkably many lay services occurred and (that) the number of lay preachers increased dramatically."[1] That this proliferation disturbed the authorities is borne out by the fact that the government felt it necessary to restrict and control these practices by legislating specific conditions under which they might still be continued in the future. Article 14 of the General Regulation stipulated that lay preachers had to become certified and could be active only in the congregations of which they themselves were members. Even then they were allowed to conduct services only after the resident pastor had given his consent.[2] Article 15 added a remarkable dimension by specifying that anyone disobeying Article 14, "...thereby creating disorder", would be subject to censure and would, if necessary, be turned over to the civil authorities.[3] Recognizing the questionable efficacy of ecclesiastical discipline, the State was reserving the right to apply secular pressures. The

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1. Keizer, Afscheiding, p. 54.
2. Archiefstukken Betreffende de Afscheiding van 1834, F.L. Bos, ed., Vol. I (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1939), P. xiv.
3. Loc. cit.

intention of the authorities seems clear. They must have known that the Church no longer satisfied the spiritual needs of the kleine luyden and that this was the principal cause for the growth of the unauthorized religious practices. Many of these conventicles relied for their sessions on itinerant lay preachers, some of whom came from as far away as Hannover, Germany.[4] Article 14 was clearly directed against them. Furthermore, few officially appointed ministers could feel flattered by the existence of groups within their churches who considered their pastors merely "book-wise, men who did not have the spirit,"[5] groups which preferred to hold unofficial services without them. Yet these very ministers were given authority to decide whether or not gatherings would be permitted. The threat of legal action in this matter is therefore especially surprising and not a little revealing. For centuries the Netherlands had been justly renowned for the tolerance shown its religious dissenters and non-Christian residents. Furthermore, the tolerance preached by the French philosophers had been widely applauded in well-to-do Dutch circles and was very much in fashion at the time. Yet here, in a matter which concerned primarily devout, ordinary people in small country churches, action by secular authorities was threatened if a practice which had become a tradition for many people was not carried out within the strictures of the new law. It would almost lead one to believe the authorities were bent on forcing the kleine luyden back into the Church. It would seem as if they anticipated disobed-

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4. Algra, Wonder, p. 97.
5. Keizer, Afscheiding, p. 54.

ience, even disorder, and in Article 15 prepared themselves to deal with it whenever it came. If so, they did not have to wait long.

In 1819, three years after the General Regulation had taken effect, almost the entire consistory of the church in Axel, Zeeland, was dismissed because its members had spoken out against the new order.[6] The response was entirely predictable. Following the lead of Pieter Marys, a deacon in the dismissed consistory, dissenting members of the Axel Church opened their homes for unofficial religious meetings and invited an itinerant preacher named Jan Willem Vygeboom to conduct their services.[7] Vygeboom, however, was at the time busy in the northern provinces and it was not until Sunday, June 16, 1822, that he conducted his first service in Axel, in the home of Marys. In the next three days two further meetings were held; then the authorities stepped in. Four men--Vygeboom, Marys, Louis de Regt and David van Kerkvoort--were charged, taken to court and convicted.[8] They were also fined which, in the case of Marys, the "ringleader", amounted to the not inconsiderable sum of f126.27½ which, after he lost his appeal, was raised to a total of f230.82½.[9] A baker by trade, Marys probably earned somewhere near the average salary for bakers in Zeeland, which in 1819 was 77 cents per day.[10] This meant that for putting his house to unlawful use Marys had to pay a year's salary, a heavy penalty by any standard.

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6. Archiefstukken, I, p. 2, note.
7. Loc. cit.
8. Ibid., pp. 2-4.
9. Ibid., p. 18, note.
10. I. J. Brugmans, Statistieken van de Nederlandse Nyverheid uit de Eerste Helft der 19e Eeuw, Book I ('s Gravenhage: Martinus Nyhoff, 1956, p. 271.

The official documents relating to the case concerning the Axel troubles indicate quite clearly the manner in which the authorities looked upon the people involved. Louis de Regt, in a letter to the King (April 1823), protested his innocence on a number of grounds: ignorance of the new laws, the centuries-old tradition of holding religious meetings in private homes without prosecution, and the permissiveness of local officials.[11] He was referred to as an honest and respected farmer, energetic and well-intentioned.[12] More important, it appears that de Regt as a member of the town council and man of some means had considerable influence in the Axel region.[13] It is this fact that is stressed repeatedly and even the Minister of Justice, who saw no valid legal reasons for granting the pardon, agreed with the Governor of Zeeland that to show mercy would indeed be "politically expedient."[14] In his letter to the King, therefore, the Minister stressed that it is "...for this reason and this reason alone that I feel free to propose to Your Majesty that Louis de Regt be exempted from paying the fine and costs to which he was sentenced."[15] De Regt went free. He was a good man, not without influence, a man of some means.

None of the others were treated so generously: few of them were men of means. Some thirty-five Axel signatories of a letter to the King (Dec. 16, 1823) were described in some detail by the Minister of

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11. Archiefstukken, II, p. 5.
12. Ibid., p. 8.
13. Loc. cit.
14. Ibid., p. 10.
15. Ibid., p. 11.

Worship, a certain van Pallandt van Keppel.[16] His comments were appended to a report he sent the King (March 20, 1824) concerning that letter. The descriptions are most unfavourable from beginning to end. Marys has "a weak and confused set of brains", and is suspected of having abused his wife. Others are either stubborn or bullheaded, insignificant, irresponsible, thoroughly immoral. One man is said to have illicit relations with women other than his own wife, another left his wife after abusing his stepchildren. Most as described as having no means, as being poor or utterly destitute (dood arm). The term dom, which means stupid, dull or dense, is used to describe nineteen of these people. One retired couple is believed to have a small fortune of around f25,000. They are therefore thought to have had some influence, which they allegedly used to persuade others to join Vygeboom's group. Another retired man of some means, one of Vygeboom's most ardent followers, is supposedly modest in appearance but is said to be sly and equivocal; he also treats his wife badly. Vygeboom himself the Minister had earlier described as "shiftless and dangerous" and his followers as "fanatical."[17]

Most of the dissenters are described as either farm labourers, farmers, tenant-farmers, or just labourers, while there were also among them a blacksmith, a baker, a carter, a bargeman, a tailor, a corn chandler and seller of flour. They were distinctly kleine luyden, whose insignificance was painfully obvious in the report. There need be no

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16. All of the following descriptions can be found Ibid., pp. 25-27.
17. Ibid., p. 12.

doubt about the relative ignorance of these people--five out of fifty-one signatories of a second letter to the King (May 10, 1824) "signed" with a simple X [18]--yet it is somewhat hard to believe that so many of them were in reality as stupid and worthless as the Minister made them appear to be.

It is important to note, however, that throughout the increasingly bitter conflict the letters and reports of government officials remained distressingly full of pejorative expressions and comments. The secret report on the extent of the separatist movement prepared in 1836 by Janssen* fits the same general pattern. The kleine luyden of the Afscheiding, then an irrevocable fact, here too appear not merely insignificant, they are presented as being mean and insignificant. There was obvious disdain for these common folk, the disdain of the gegoede stand** for het volk**. This unfortunate bias probably led the government to believe that they could indeed force the insignificant and powerless kleine luyden to conform. It caused them to underestimate the importance that tradition and religious conviction might have to many among the poor.

While Vygeboom may not have been a true fore-runner of the Afscheiding of 1834, as G. Keizer claims, [19] it cannot be denied that his activities in Axel and the resultant appeals to the King caused

* The same Janssen who was chiefly responsible for drafting the General Regulation of 1816. See above.

** See glossary

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18. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

19. Keizer, Afscheiding, p. 62.

the authorities for the first time to come to grips with the idea of separation. The first appeal which Vygeboom and his followers addressed to the King--surely the Prince of Orange would understand--was in essence an appeal for freedom of religion. If Greek and Arminian Christian, Lutherans, Mennonites, Jansenists, even Jews were allowed to practice their beliefs within the walls of the nation's capital, argued Vygeboom, surely "the appellants should not deserve scorn and rejection merely because they are Hervormd (Reformed)?"[20] He also insisted that no one must accuse his group of apostasy or of being schismatic because "the appellants are undoubtedly the ones who still adhere to the old Reformed teachings in all sincerity."[21] This is as close as Vygeboom came to telling the King that most of his people had asked that their names be erased from the membership roll of the Axel Hervormd Church and that he now called his group "The Restored Church of Christ."[22] The Minister of Worship advised the King that a distinction had to be made between religious convictions and religious groups. The constitution grants complete freedom for the former but not the latter. Only those religious groups already in existence at the time the Constitution was adopted are protected and enjoy certain privileges. No new religious organizations may be formed, however, without first obtaining the King's permission. The Minister continued:

> The petitioners want to remain in the Hervormd religion while separating from the Hervormd Church; their intention, then,

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20. Archiefstukken, I, p. 20.
21. Loc. cit.
22. Keizer, Afscheiding, p. 60.

> must be to forge a separate sect out of an existing Religion. How dangerous this could become to the tranquility and good order in the State I need not explain to Your Majesty.[23].

To this advice the Minister of Justice, Van Maanen, added (on April 9, 1824), that in his opinion the best way "to protect society against all confusion and irregularity" would be to oppose "all such fanatical schismatics" with a "strict adherence to the existing laws."[24]. Later (August 1824), both gentlemen signed a report addressed to the King in which they asserted that "the whole tenor of the spirit of these sectarians is directed at disturbing as much as possible the existing and indeed constantly growing brotherly harmony between the Hervormd people and other Protestants."[25]. Here, then, is the irony of the situation: the governing authorities, true to their avowed principle of tolerance, deliberately loosened the strictures of doctrinaire Calvinism by dropping from the confession of the Hervormd Church the Canons of Dort, thereby creating some theological breathing space for the ever growing number of liberal and Remonstrant members. In doing so they facilitated a rapprochement of sorts with other Protestant groups but alienated the traditionally orthodox kleine luyden. The threat of fragmentation posed by the potentially secessionist conventicles of the latter the government could not and would not tolerate, which is the reason why, as early as 1823, the authorities decided to apply the full force of the law against dissenting groups within the Church. In his letter of

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23. Archiefstukken, I, pp. 24-25.
24. Archiefstukken, I, p. 28.
25. Archiefstukken, I, p. 38.

October 25, 1823, the Minister of Justice instructed the Governor of Zeeland to use all measures required, even force if necessary, to enforce Articles 291 and 292 of the old penal code which prohibited, among other things, religious gatherings involving more than twenty persons. Any resistance offered to attempts to disperse such gatherings was to be viewed as rebellion and was to be dealt with as such.[26] The State had become intolerant in order to preserve tolerance. From then on in it became a matter of which side would surrender first. The authorities seem not to have doubted that the rather rude and uncouth kleine luyden would simply roll over and capitulate. They did not understand the tenacity produced when poverty and tradition are steeled by simple faith.

26. Archiefstukken, I, pp. 44-45.

V.

Little is known about the orthodox kleine luyden. Even though the Afscheiding of 1834 is not a neglected subject in Dutch historiography the kleine luyden who fashioned it are. The injustices perpetrated on Rev. Hendrik de Cock and other early secessionists are well documented, as are the almost insuperable difficulties they faced and overcame. Yet the common folk whose tenacity and endurance are responsible, in part at least, for making the separation permanent have remained largely unknown. Only H. Algra has examined these forgotten people in some detail, but much of his information was based on the situation pertaining after 1850.* Small wonder then that in the absence of a clear and complete picture of the Afscheiding the event was seen as remarkable, almost a miracle.

While few documents actually describe any of the kleine luyden, inferences drawn from a variety of sources nonetheless allow us more than just a glimpse of their condition and character. In 1825, for instance, a book appeared in Amsterdam about the English Reformed Church. In it the author made some revealing comments about those attending conventicles or oefeningen:

> I for one am not in the least opposed to the so-called oefeningen; quite the contrary, I believe that, provided they are well organized, they could work to considerable advantage for some people. They are well suited to allow the poor man who stays away from church because of his rags to meet with his peers. They offer him

* The English translation of the title of Algra's book would be The Miracle of the Nineteenth Century. Unfortunately, the author failed to cite most of his sources.

> a good seat, which he probably would not get in the regular church. Besides, there one can descend to a commonness and coarse manner of speech which, while it suits the hearing of insignificant folk, would offend the sophisticated ear. The lay preacher, moreover, is usually a pretty good extemporaneous speaker which, for a variety of reasons, the regular minister is not.[1.]

The writer, a Reverend Mr. Broes, was a distinguished member of the Hervormd Church. Not only was he a well-known preacher and church historian, he was also a member of the General Synod, and had even served as its president.[2.] On several occasions he counselled the King on how to deal with unrest in the Church, his last plea for moderation being rejected as late as May 22, 1834, partly because his views were considered merely those of an "old professor."[3.] When this same old professor in his comments about the conventicles mentioned the "poor man", he was not referring to mere paupers. The "poor man" was anyone outside the upper class or gegoede stand.* Rev. Broes was hardly charitable in his comments, yet it is not unlikely that his assessment was fairly accurate. The kleine luyden he referred to were more than likely somewhat lacking in refinement, although when it came to selecting their speakers they evidently showed good judgement.

The conventicles Rev. Broes described were in all probability not to be found in the big cities, almost certainly not in Amsterdam.

* See glossary

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1. Archiefstukken, p. 121, note. Quoted from W. Broes, De Geschiedenis der Engelsche Hervormde Kerk benevens haren invloed op onze Nederlandsche, van de tyd der Hervorming aan (Delft, 1825) I, pp. 231, 232.

2. Ibid., p. 109, note.

3. Ibid., p. 264.

Although concerned about the activities of Bilderdyk, Holland's most renowned literary figure of the day, and da Costa, the former's devoted student and passionate objector to the spirit of his age, the Minister of Worship informed his King (October 31, 1825) that the troubles in Amsterdam were still of a minor nature, the churches were well attended, and the ministers were free from harrassment.[4] Besides, da Costa and his group were sophisticated people, not kleine luyden. They were intellectuals and businessmen who wrote and read poetry. Their speech was far from coarse and although da Costa was often short of money he wore no rags.

The rude and uncouth people of Rev. Broes' description were those found in the country towns and villages where conditions were harsh and unhealthy. In 1826, for instance, a conventicle in Klundert, North Brabant, located in the southern Netherlands, collected f30.00 for "the sick and needy in Groningen and Friesland "[5] in the north where serious epidemics had ravaged the countryside.[6] Germain in this respect is a comment by B.H. Slicher van Bath on social conditions prevailing in the country at that time:

> In some places, especially where the population had increased rapidly, the conditions of health and housing were particularly bad. The worst were the districts where the people were no longer all employed in agriculture, and in the past, practised some form of home industry. The poor lived in turf huts, put up with clandestine haste on the common land. People dwelt in pig-styes, sheep stalls and stoke holes outside the village or hamlet, on the outskirts of agricultural society. In these damp and unhygienic hovels, overcrowded with children and feeble

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4. Ibid., p. 67.
5. Ibid., p. 118.
6. Loc. cit., note.

> old folk, families lived together with the blind, the lame, the crippled, the simple and the insane--all too numerous in those communities. The government did nothing for these unfortunates, who were left entirely to the care of their relatives.[7]

Relevant too are I.J. Brugmans' claims that between 1815 and 1850 the population growth in the Netherlands was 38%[8] and that up until 1860 the country population increased more rapidly than that of the cities.[9] Johan Goudsblom, writing about Holland in the 1850's, added:

> The bulk of the population still lived in rural communities and pursued an agrarian economy....(They) were economically poor, politically powerless, socially subordinate, and culturally unenlightened....the great majority of people lived most of their lives in local or regional isolation. Standards of hygiene and sanitation were low compared with today, and the average life expectancy at birth only just exceeded 30 years.[10]

Poverty, often extreme poverty, and isolation were the conditions in which the bulk of Holland's population found itself in the first half of the nineteenth century. A peculiarity of Dutch society in this period was the absence of a social group between the poor and the rich. The growing impoverishment of the craftsmen, small farmers and merchants had already been apparent prior to 1795.[11] The kleine luyden Rev. Broes mentioned in 1825, as well as the ones involved in the Afscheiding itself, lived in a society which knew only two classes: the upper class or gegoede stand* and the poor, referred to either as de armen or het volk*.[12] In

* See glossary

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7. Slicher van Bath, Agrarian History, pp. 317-18.
8. Brugmans, Arbeidende Klasse, p. 138.
9. Ibid., p. 73.
10. Goudsblom, Dutch Nation, p. 20.
11. Brugmans, Paardenkracht, p. 61.
12. Ibid., p. 87.

the absence of upward mobility this stratification became rigid, the upper class remaining a closed group. It is with this in mind that all letters and reports of the authorities relating to the oefeningen and the Afscheiding must be examined. It will go far to explain the paternalism and disdain with which the orthodox kleine luyden were viewed and dealt with. It certainly sheds some light on the apartheid policy implicit in the comments of Rev. Broes.

In many official missives concerning those kleine luyden who were no longer happy in the Hervormd Church, they were described as fanatics. However, the evidence suggests that they were not. Up until October 2, 1832, the only action government officials felt constrained to take against the conventicles arose from the fact that these gatherings were attracting numbers in excess of twenty, the limit established under the old Napoleonic penal code. At these meetings psalms were sung, passages from Scripture were read and explained, and prayers were recited. There is no evidence that these events created disorder or were in themselves disorderly. There is no evidence either of zealous evangelizing by orthodox Calvinists. If anything, they wanted to be left alone; they craved freedom of worship, as their letters clearly indicated. Disturbances which did occur, as in October of 1832 in the city of Utrecht, came about not because of the fanaticism of the faithful, but rather because of the scandalous behaviour of a crowd of young adults led, it was alleged, by some fifty university students[13.] who broke into homes, smashed up furniture, and threatened the devout who attended a conventicle.[14.] All this is not to say that the kleine luyden

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13. Archiefstukken, I, pp. 170, 181.
14. Ibid., pp. 166-200.

did not feel strongly about their meetings and their faith. There is, however, a considerable difference between strongly held views or deeply felt emotions, and fanaticism.

The government documents also refer consistently to the orthodox kleine luyden as being dom, which as was mentioned earlier means stupid, dense, or dull. It was a foolish charge, as foolish and unconvincing as it would have been to suggest that those who made it were clever. Certainly the letters these "dull" people wrote their King lacked neither perception nor skill. Besides, that so many letters were written to begin with is in itself rather remarkable. We know that some--De Regt and Marys, for instance--were aided by sollicitors.[15] Others may also have sought assistance from experts, although the sources do not indicate this with any degree of clarity. Whatever the case may be, dull people would hardly have bothered. Moreover, those kleine luyden who incurred the ire of the officials and especially of the Minister of Worship, Baron van Pallandt van Keppel, claimed to adhere to orthodox Calvinist doctrines which, if anything, do not stand out for their simplicity.

Regardless of whether the kleine luyden wrote their letters unaided or not, their correspondence was amazingly uniform in content. Almost all letters appealed for freedom of worship and many of them referred to the past to support their case. Several references were made to the "three stranded cord" of the Church, Orange, and either het volk* or the fatherland.[16] In the great bulk of these letters

* See glossary

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15. Archiefstukken, I, pp. 6 and 21.
16. Ibid., especially pp. 166, 168, 179, 181, and 207.

an awareness of history as viewed from the Orangist perspective is clearly evident. It is also apparent that most writers viewed their unauthorized meetings as acquired rights. One writer claimed (April 1823) that such meetings, "a centuries old practice in various regions of our Fatherland," had never before been banned from being held in private homes.[17] Another implied that his conventicle hailed back to the French period, for he wrote (February 1828) that "this conventicle (gezelschap) was not considered dangerous or damaging by any of the successive governments."[18] A third correspondent stated categorically (January 1833) that he had been conducting meetings for more than thirty years and had never been disturbed, not even under the highly suspicious regime of Napoleon.[19] The uniformity of the appeals is the more remarkable when one considers the relative isolation from which the various writers addressed their remarks to their King. They shared a common loyalty: to the God of Scripture and the Orange King. They also shared a common tradition: that of meeting in small groups to study, sing, and pray. Finally, they expressed a common desire: permission to continue their cherished practices. Yet they knew very little about one another.

There is one striking difference between the official documents and the letters from the kleine luyden. Fear of secession is evident throughout the letters and reports of the authorities from the very start while the appeals by the common people to the King never so much

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17. Ibid., p. 5.
18. Ibid., p. 118.
19. Ibid., pp. 208, 209.

as hinted at it until a postal employee by the name of Schröter warned the King (October 16, 1832) that a forced cessation of religious meetings could easily lead to separation (afscheiding) and a schism in the Church.[20] Sufficient evidence exists to suggest that the kleine luyden for long had no intention of secession. They simply were not sufficiently unified, nor radical enough for that matter, to foster such an idea. They were no revolutionaries who carefully plotted a strategy and deliberately sought its realization. They were honest, quiet, down-to-earth "little" folk who found themselves increasingly pushed around by the authorities. Until Rev. Hendrik de Cock became active in Ulrum in the northern province of Groningen, late in 1833, the kleine luyden had no leader, their cause no effective champion. Allard Pierson observed in 1872 that the religious fanaticism which occasionally surfaced in the Netherlands was the product of the general Dutch inclination for theology on the one hand, and ignorance mixed with the nervous emotionalism caused by idolizing of ministers on the other.[21] While it would be difficult to determine accurately to what degree the "inclination for theology" affected the conduct of the orthodox kleine luyden prior to 1833, we do know that until Rev. de Cock gained prominence they "idolized" few ministers and showed little "nervous emotionalism."

Why did these simple folk no longer respect their pastors? One letter was more revealing than the others in this regard. It read in

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20. Ibid., p. 177.

21. Allard Pierson, "Isaak da Costa naar zyn brieven" (1872), in Oudere Tydgenoten (Amsterdam: P. N. Van Kampen & Zoon, 1904), pp. 13-14.

part as follows:

> The inhabitants of the country, and no less so those of some of our cities, live in most instances in a state of hostility and near-war with their ministers because they cannot accept the apostasy their pastors are trying to force upon them. For this reason many of them have been avoiding the public church services. Thus deprived of religious instruction, these religious people felt a need for meeting with each other so as to grow together in the true faith and to instruct one another in the Word of God. These meetings of course have become so numerous that ministers have become less reserved about proclaiming false doctrines from the pulpits.[22]

There is more to this comment than at first meets the eye. It has to be remembered that prior to the introduction of the General Regulation (1816) local congregations "called" only ministers of their own choosing. Whenever a vacancy occurred the consistory would invite the members to submit names of ministers considered suitable. Having established a list of two or three names, the consistory would then send delegates to speak with the ministers thus designated and invite them to preach whenever possible. Only after careful scrutiny, therefore, would a vacant congregation "call" a new minister. While this process might seem cumbersome, it at least allowed a general participation while at the same time it increased the probability of compatibility between minister and congregation. Ever since 1816, however, all this had changed. Ministers were now simply appointed by the new church hierarchy, a hierarchy which could hardly be characterized as having a great deal of understanding for and sensitivity towards the kleine luyden. At any rate, it is more than likely that the new system gave offense if only because a traditional practice had been tampered with; a right, one of the few the

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22. Archiefstukken, I, p. 210.

kleine luyden could claim, had been removed. Given the stubbornness which often characterized the attitude of rural folk toward matters affecting their habits and customs, newly appointed ministers must have found it extremely difficult to become accepted by these people. If on top of this the new ministers proved to be "liberal" as well, if their theology was considered as much an imposition as their appointment, "hostility and near-war" might well be the result. And so the kleine luyden began to stay away from church and, in its stead, expanded the age old custom of meeting in private homes for mutual edification and support.

As we have seen, the kleine luyden were an unassuming sort of people who quietly performed their tasks and carried out their duties. They were small farmers, cottars, day labourers, bakers, carpenters, painters, weavers, blacksmiths, bargemen, fishermen, wallpaper hangers, butchers, teachers, small merchants--in short, working people from all sectors of agriculture, trade, commerce, and industry. They were reliable and practical, lacking the passion and fervor of some southern European people. Da Costa, as Allard Pierson has pointed out, although much admired, never became one with his fellow combatants against the spirit of the age precisly because he lacked that calm, phlegmatic nature of the Dutch.[23] He was of Jewish-Portuguese heritage; he was a hot-tempered man. It would be wrong to assume that the Dutch kleine luyden would quietly allow any power to push them around forever. They did, however, require strong and incisive leadership.

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23. Pierson, Tydgenoten, pp. 12-13.

They needed a champion, a standard bearer, an inspiring leader. Da Costa could have become that leader, but he did not seek nor wish to fulfill that rôle. Besides, he disapproved of secession.[24] Instead, the mantle fell on Hendrik de Cock, Hervormd minister in the tiny Groningen town of Ulrum.

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24. Pierson, Willem de Clercq, II, p. 153.

## VI.

Rev. Hendrik de Cock was suspended from his pastoral duties on December 19, 1833. One reason was that he had written a strongly worded pamphlet against two fellow pastors who themselves had written disparagingly about those attending conventicles. De Cock, characteristically, had not minced his words. He had referred to his colleagues as wolves, thieves, murderers, pharisees, hypocrites, perjurers, as "blind guides to the blind who are leading the blind in such a way that everybody will end up in the ditch."[1] Another reason was that de Cock had baptized and instructed people other than those who lived in his own town, which had led to complaints by other ministers.[2] Clearly word of de Cock's inspired preaching had spread beyond Ulrum. Keizer wrote: "In those days the Word of God was rare yet precious to all friends of truth. A deep hunger lay over the land, and when they heard about grain and bread being offered they rose up together and went to Ulrum."[3] J. Wesseling has recorded the dramatic increase in the number of de Cock's listeners through the annual collection figures at the Ulrum Church. Between 1830 and 1832, annual figures dropped from f310.85 in 1830 to f257.62 in 1831, and to f207.09 in

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1. Hendrik de Cock, Verdediging van de Ware Gereformeerde Leer en van de Ware Gereformeerden, bestreden en ten toon gesteld door twee zoogenaamde Gereformeerde Leeraars, of de Schaapskooi van Christus aangetast door twee wolven en verdedigd door H. de Cock, Gereformeerd Leeraar te Ulrum (Groningen: H. J. Bolt, 1833), p. III, ff.

2. H. de Cock, Hendrik de Cock, Eerste Afgescheiden Predikant in Nederland (Delfzyl: Jan Haan, 1886), pp. 104-105.

3. Keizer, Afscheiding, p. 241.

1832. Then, suddenly, after de Cock's discovery of Calvin's Institutes and other orthodox writing, came the new emphasis in his preaching and the sudden growth in attendance at his services; figures rose again to f493.97 collected in 1833.[4]

The fact that de Cock did not come to embrace orthodox Calvinism until around 1832 once again lends credence to the notion that the separatist movement he initiated late in 1834 was not a long sought-after objective. According to his son and biographer, de Cock did not become aware of the close connection between the Calvinistic ideas and reality until he read a pamphlet by Baron van Zuylen van Nyevelt, a Réveil man, titled "The Only Salvation" (De Eenige Redding).[5] Suddenly de Cock began to see the terrible suffering of the folk around him as a punishment from God. His son refers to the debacle of the Belgian revolution, the cholera epidemics and the deteriorating morals of the people as the elements which his father now began to see as the consequences of the general abandonment of the pure preaching of God's Word.

> As Christian, and especially as minister aware of his calling to seek the well-being of both Church and State, these problems now drove him to facilitate the spread of truth with everything that was in him.[6]

Hence the new fire and enthusiasm in his preaching. Hence also his suddenly prolific written attacks on a wide range of people and alleged abuses.

Not only did de Cock receive support and encouragement from the

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4. J. Wesseling, De Afscheiding van 1834 in Groningerland (Groningen: Uitgevery de Vuurbank, 1972), pp. 34-35.

5. de Cock, Hendrik de Cock, p. 22.

6. Ibid., p. 23.

growing number of visitors to his sermons--some even came from the neighbouring province of Friesland[7.]--in December, 1833, he received a letter from Rev. H. P. Scholte, Hervormd minister in the North Brabant town of Doeveren. "Your books," wrote Scholte, "were balm in the wound and were again instruments in the hand of God for lifting the eye of faith to the eternal and almighty King of the Church."[8.] How or why Scholte had been selected by the Amsterdam publisher to receive the books is not known. It is clear, however, that Scholte referred to de Cock's pamphlet against the "two wolves" who had attacked the "sheep-fold" mentioned earlier and his republication of and comments about the Canons of Dort.[9.] More to the point, the two men became each other's principal mainstay. L. Oostendorp was unquestionably correct when he wrote: "So heavily were these two to lean upon each other that the Afscheiding is unthinkable without both and no one can quite say who inspired the other the more."[10.]

It took almost a year after de Cock's suspension before his Ulrum congregation formulated and signed the famous Certificate of Secession or Restoration (October 3, 1834). It was clearly not a step lightly taken. During the interim period de Cock was not idle; he wrote much and spoke often. He also had to face increasingly

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7. Ibid., p. 35.

8. Keizer, Afscheiding, p. 283.

9. Hendrik de Cock, Besluiten van de Nationale Dordsche Synode; gehouden in den jare 1618 en 1619, te Dordrecht. Uitgegeven en met eene voorrede van Hendrik de Cock, Gereformeerd Leeraar te Ulrum (Veendam: T. E. Mulder, 1833).

10. L. Oostendorp, H. P. Scholte; Leader of the Secession of 1834 and Founder of Pella (Franeker: T. Wever, 1964), p. 48.

bitter opposition. His support, however, grew, as did that of Scholte. In fact, when the latter, suspended on October 29 for preaching in Ulrum only one day before the secession there occurred, presented his congregation with an Act of Withdrawal on November 1, 1834, some 287 people signed.[11] The Ulrum certificate bore only 130 signatures. There is, however, something remarkable about that document from Ulrum, as we are about to see.

The Certificate of Secession or Restoration of the Ulrum congregation was signed by three different kinds of supporters. Forty-nine signatories, the document indicates, were members of the Ulrum Hervormd Church. Eighteen others, grouped separately, were said to be new members, admitted by the consistory after de Cock's suspension. A third group, numbering sixty-three, were described as "...heads of families who are not members but who, with their families, wish to join the Gereformeerde* congregation."[12] Aside from the fact that some signed for others who could not write--a Swaantje Sygers Bos signed for seven others, de Cock's wife for four--and that the handwriting of most was extremely clumsy, the division into three groups is revealing. As Wesseling has shown, by far the greater bulk of Hervormd Church members in the Ulrum district were baptized members only, not professing members. He attributed this phenomenon to the influence of the Enlightenment, in

* See glossary

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11. Ibid., p. 63.

12. de Cock, Hendrik de Cock, p. 302. Keizer, Afscheiding, copy of the original document in Appendix, between pages 576 and 577.

other words to the new liberalism which had led many to become indifferent to Christianity and its teachings, and also to the prevailing mysticism in the Church which required that those making public profession of faith recount publicly the details of their conversion experience. According to Wesseling this practice caused embarrassment to many a "child of God" and thus tended to impede the way to public profession and participation in Holy Communion.[13] It seems understandable that especially the unsophisticated, poorly educated kleine luyden would rather forget about joining the Church than have to go through the trauma of addressing their fellows in a public church service. It would also seem valid to assume that the situation prevailing in this traditionally devout northern region applied in most other areas of the country as well.

Mindful, then, of the widespread indifference towards the Church we must examine the consequences of the formal secession of Ulrum and Doeveren. On November 18, 1834, de Cock arrived in the Groningen town of Smilde, where thirty-eight people had already seceded.[14] The next day a new Gereformeerde* congregation was established there, consisting of seventy-six members, almost half of whom had come from neighbouring towns and hamlets. Their oefenaar* became L. Dykstra, who had been active in that capacity in local conventicles and who had been accepted as a professing member by the Ulrum consistory only two days earlier. The new congregation, wrote de Cock's son,

* See glossary

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13. J. Wesseling, De Afscheiding van 1834, pp. 22-25. According to his findings less than 10% of the 5507 baptized members in the Ulrum district (ring) were full members of the Church, p. 23.

14. de Cock, Hendrik de Cook, p. 337.

consisted

> ...primarily of people from the labouring and insignificant (geringen) social class. There as well as in almost all other localities was the word of the Apostles realized: Brethren, consider your call, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, I Cor. 1:26."[15]

How were objections from the local magistrates dealt with? According to de Cock, Jr.: "...the word of the Apostles 'we must obey God before people' was here also mentioned to the Burgomaster, who was invited to witness the proceedings to ascertain that nothing untoward would occur."[16] In like manner new secessionist congregations were formed until by the end of 1835 some seventy-one afgescheiden churches had come into being, a number which by the end of 1836 had grown to 128.[17]

H. Algra wrote of the "explosive character" of the Afscheiding.[18] Explosive is hardly the right word. On April 1, 1836, the total number of secessionists in the whole country was estimated at roughly 4,000, while perhaps 1,200 more were expected to follow. Of these two groups combined no more than 3,500 were believed to be adults.[19] F.L. Bos, who edited the material, believed this estimate to be far too low.[20] Yet even if the figures were doubled they would still constitute a tiny minority of the 1,430,000 "souls" then said to be members of the Hervormd Church.[21] Whatever the case, on March 2, 1836, the leaders of the separatist movement held their first General Synod in Amsterdam

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15. Ibid., p. 337.
16. Ibid., p. 335.
17. Algra, Wonder, pp. 120, map.
18. Ibid., p. 121.
19. Archiefstukken, III, p. 182.
20. Ibid., p. 183, note.
21. Loc. cit.

attended by the only five ordained secessionist ministers then active in the country. The Gemeente Jesu Christi, later known as the Christelyk Afgescheiden Gereformeerde Kerk, had become an official and irrevocable fact.

Conclusion

While the Afscheiding of 1834 was formally the result of a theological conflict between two young ministers and the State Church, the movement would not have occurred had it not been for the traditionalism of the kleine luyden who supported de Cock and Scholte. Given the influence of ministers over rather isolated churches it is not at all surprising that so few people joined the secessionists. Hardly any pastors joined, and those who did were young men the Church authorities saw fit to suspend because of their rashness. In 1836 de Cock at thirty-five years of age was the oldest. Scholte was then thirty-one, Meerburg was thirty, Van Velzen twenty-six, Brummelkamp and Van Raalte twenty-five.[1] Since neither the religious establishment nor the upper class Réveil men decided to join these young Turks in their unequal struggle, the support they did receive must be explained in terms other than theological.

The oefeningen and gezelschappen, referred to in this study as conventicles, had long formed an integral part of religious life in the Netherlands. The rather brutal intervention of the State in Church affairs, expressed in the draconian General Regulation of 1816, only served to encourage a more widespread participation in this tradition, especially by those for whom Christianity was rapidly becoming the only source of succor in an increasingly impoverished society.

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1. A, Van der Meiden, De Zwarte-Kousen Kerken (Utrecht: Amboboeken, 1968), p. 136.

It is an open question whether or not the Afscheiding would have received the support it did had not the authorities made such a persistent attempt to impede the peaceful existence of the people's acquired right to meet in private homes for religious purposes. When, however, two ordained ministers of the Gospel began again to preach the Word of God as it was still being heard in many of these conventicles the kleine luyden who met there began to look to them for guidance. How else is it to be explained that some seventy groups chose to associate themselves with de Cock and Scholte during 1835? From the tables prepared for the Ministry of Worship[2] it becomes obvious that in very few instances did entire congregations secede from the Church. Meppel: twenty-two members; Kolderveen: thirteen; Nyeveen: eight; Vledder: twenty; Diever: twenty; Dwingelo: thirty-five; and so it continues page after page.[3] It is difficult to escape the conclusion that these small groups were in fact established conventicles whose members had begun to feel detached from the Church, who resented the high-handed measures adopted by a government consisting almost exclusively of well-to-do people.

The Afscheiding of 1834 was both a bona-fide religious movement and a social one. Da Costa, Groen van Prinsterer, the brothers Hoogendorp, Messchert, de Clercq, Réveil men all, concerned about and hostile to the spirit of their age, remained within the Church, attempting to reform it from within. The younger, less experienced,

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2. Archiefstukken, III, pp. 157-183.
3. Ibid., p. 181.

certainly intellectually less formidable secessionist leaders brought upon themselves a reaction not even the virulently Orangist Bilderdyk ever experienced. Yet the secessionists found an increasing number of conventicles becoming quietly arrayed behind them in defiance of both government and public pressure. It was a support inspired by a combination of tradition, despair, and faith. It proved to be an indestructible matrix from which, ultimately, a new denomination sprang.

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GLOSSARY

aanzienlyken: notables, prominent people, members of the upper classes

afscheiding: separation, secession

armen: the poor; in early nineteenth century Holland all those considered not among the aanzienlyken were either referred to as the armen or as the volk.

classis: name for Protestant dioceses in the Netherlands; also the name for regional assemblies of ministers and elders governing such a diocese

classes: plural form of classis

gegoede stand: the monied or propertied class; also, according to I. J. Brugmans, an estate more than a class, "...held together more by a lifestyle and reputation than by a high level of income; impoverished nobility, for instance, also belonged to this group."[1].

Gereformeerd: the distinction between gereformeerd and hervormd cannot be rendered in English. Reformed is the English term for both. Gereformeerd is the name which the Dutch Calvinists of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries adopted for the official Church. Hervormd is the milder term which came into general use in the eighteenth century. The secessionists of the 1830's revived the original name and appropriated it.

gezelschap: company (of friends), society; in days of the Dutch Republic, informal teaching assemblies or Bible study groups

Hervormd: See Gereformeerd above.

kerk: church

kleine luyden: the ordinary, common people; the less affluent merchants and tradesmen, the artisans, small farmers, labourers of all kinds, the clergy, teachers, the poor; the insignificant, unimportant folk

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1. I. J. Brugmans, Paardenkracht en Mensenmacht: Sociaal-Economische Geschiedenis van Nederland, 1895-1940 ('s Gravenhage: Martinus Nyhoff, 1961), p. 195.

oefeningen: practices; in religion, lay preaching sessions, prayer meetings or Bible study sessions

stand: rank, class or estate; see gegoede stand above

volk: the common people; the non-enfranchised labouring classes; the poor